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ENGINEERS IN JOURNALISM

By ROBERT BOYCE

"Slipstick subjects" are not the only ones in which engineers shine. Ten million engineers regularly read almost two thousand publications which are written, edited, published, and sold by engineers.

What place do engineers have in writing these periodicals? Engineers trained as writers and business men are needed to produce them because it is just as important that technical articles reflect a knowledge of the subjects as it is that they be readably written.

Interested in the possibilities of this kind of work I wrote to several different engineering editors and asked what training was necessary and what opportunities there were. I got as many different reactions as there were replies.

They all agreed upon some points in spite of the many conflicting opinions. Most of them believed engineering experience was beneficial after graduation. E. F. Ross, engineering editor of "Steel", says, "Work in the engineering field for a period after graduation is to be recommended, but is not an essential requirement." Mr. Ross says he and several of his associates in the Penton organization had experience on the "Purdue Exponent while in college, but few of them considered technical journalism as a vocation at the time.

Most of the editors believed that engineering should be the principal course studied in college and that subjects to train for writing should be worked in, such as: English, English composition, economics, psychology, public speaking, and journalism. David L. Fiske, secretary of the American Society of Refrigerating Engineers believes that the engineering course itself is too narrowly taught, and Otto Reinmuth of the "Journal of Chemical Education" says a general knowledge of English Literature and allusions is necessary. Frequent examples of this can be found in writing, such as, the title "Parliament of

Fowls" applied to an article about a Cleveland poultry convention. The author probably got his idea from Chaucer.

Some of the qualities which editors think student writers should develop are: accuracy, the ability to write simply and clearly, an interest in undergraduate journalism, and the use of correct English.

In my search for information, I met, on our own campus, Professor John M. Weed, editor of the Engineering Experiment Station News, who says he doesn't see very green pastures for those who try to do just engineering writing; he thinks the writing had ordinarily better be a by-product. He believes that the training for writing can be "another string for the bow", to increase one's opportunities for employment. He also says, that although an engineer may have writing ability, everyone cannot be an editor, for there have to be copy and proof-readers, too.

As an example of a technical journalist's start, Harry Weiss, an Antioch College graduate in chemistry, is working as a cub reporter on the "Cleveland Plain Dealer", and expects to start his science writing when he is finished with his present experience. Weiss advises a student to study the branch of science or engineering most interesting to him and let the writing take care of itself.

For those interested in this work we can conclude that no definite course be prescribed, but the best training is to fit one's self primarily as an engineer, by taking as many English, literature, and social science courses as can be squeezed in his schedule, along with journalistic extra-curricular activities. Then when the engineer graduates and works as an engineer, his writing abilities will probably be recognized by an engineering publication and his ambition realized. In the meantime the student should learn how to build bridges from mathematical symbols as well as sentences from simple words.

There was a young lady named Banker,
Who slept while the ship was at anchor,
But she awoke with dismay
When she heard the mate say,
"Now hoist the sheet and spanker."
—Minnesota Techno Log.

Here's to the land we love and vice versa.

Doctor: "What you need is an electric bath."
Patient: "No sir, not me; I had an uncle drown
that way at Sing Sing."